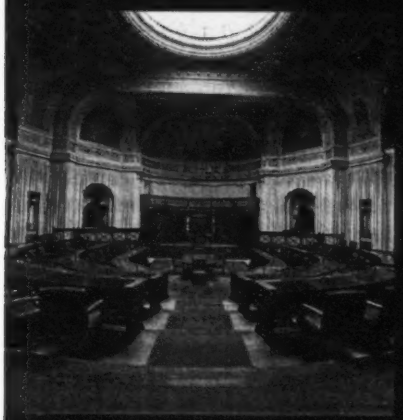
# Speech from the Throne



At the Opening of the
Fifth Session of the
39th Legislature

**November 16, 2010**

**Delivered by:**
**The Honourable Philip S. Lee, C.M., O.M.**
Lieutenant Governor of the
Province of Manitoba

Manitoba

MISTER SPEAKER AND MEMBERS OF THE MANITOBA LEGISLATURE:

Welcome to the fifth session of the 39th Legislative Assembly of the Province of Manitoba.

We find ourselves at a time of tremendous opportunity for the people of Manitoba. The choices this Assembly makes will shape our province and the lives of our citizens for years to come.

Manitoba has just come through a period of unparalleled growth. One needs only to take a look around to see the fruits of our labour.

Together we have opened new hospitals and health care facilities, providing more families with the quality care they need. We have modernized our colleges and universities, strengthening the Manitoba workforce and creating new opportunities for our youth. The MTS Centre and the new Hydro building are signature buildings in downtown Winnipeg, and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and the new stadium are under construction. And we have rebuilt the roadways that connect our communities and fuel our economy.

All of this was accomplished while balancing the province's budget – for 10 consecutive years.

Today, because of the long-term priorities we have chosen and the hard work of its citizens, Manitoba is a better place to live, work and raise a family.

The downturn in the global economy, triggered by the financial crisis of 2008 and continuing today in the guise of a slow and uneven recovery, presents new challenges for our province. Manitoba families are dealing with these challenges first-hand, in their everyday lives and in their planning for the future. They are responding with a combination of common sense and optimism.

It is with this same common sense and optimism that we look to strengthen our province, positioning Manitoba to compete and succeed in a changing global economy.

By building on our past successes and working together an even brighter future is within our reach. Now, more than ever, we must hold to a course that will keep our province moving forward.

**Creating opportunities, growing our economy**

The resilience of Manitoba's economy has been demonstrated through the recent global recession. We recorded the strongest growth of any province in 2009, by holding steady while the national economy shrank. Our average growth rate over the past five years leads the nation and our unemployment rate today is the lowest in Canada.

The near-term outlook for Manitoba businesses, however, remains challenging due to the slow recovery of our export markets and a high

Canadian dollar. To offset the impacts of the recession, our government joined in the national stimulus program initiated by the federal government. Like other governments across Canada, we chose to invest in infrastructure projects that would create immediate employment and long-term community assets. Like other governments, including the federal government, we have charted a path for the coming years that preserves our investments in people and front-line service. We will return the province to balance over a five-year period, managing growth in public expenditures and maintaining affordability for citizens – but avoiding reckless cuts.

In responding to the immediate needs of the economy, our government will also ensure that the core elements of Manitoba's growth strategy are preserved. Our strategy is founded on a working partnership struck between government, business, labour and education leaders. At the core of this collaboration is a commitment to growing a skilled work force in Manitoba, promoting our products abroad, and developing the key sectors of our economy.

New initiatives planned for the coming year will ensure that Manitoba's competitive advantage is maintained and strengthened.

Working with the *Innovation Council of Manitoba*, and building on the success of Manitoba companies like IMRIS, Cangene and New Flyer, our government will adopt a bold new *Innovation Agenda*. We will provide Manitoba entrepreneurs with peer supports and a range of programs, investments, and incentives that encompasses all stages of innovation – from idea generation to product development to capitalization and marketing.

Promotion of Manitoba trade, tourism and educational exchanges will be updated in the coming year to reflect the increasing economic importance of Brazil, Russia, India and China. Although the U.S. is – and will remain – our province's largest export market, the rapid growth of the *BRIC* nations opens up new opportunities for Manitoba businesses. In the past year our government has led delegations of business and education leaders to explore new opportunities in emerging economies. We will seek input on our new approach to trade promotion from a new Council on International Trade. Along with increased trade in manufacturing and commodities, Manitoba is seizing the potential for increased tourism from Asia; global marketing of our schools, colleges and universities; and the development of an international transportation hub at Winnipeg's CentrePort Canada.

A special priority for our government, linked to the development of CentrePort and the vision of a new *Arctic Gateway* for Canada, is the redevelopment of the Port of Churchill. At the Arctic Summit, an international gathering that took place in Winnipeg last week, delegates framed a strategy to establish a new arctic trade route. The initiative will be pursued with the full participation of Nunavut and northern indigenous peoples.

Immigration has been a key component of Manitoba's growth strategy over the past decade. Thanks to strong community supports, and a Provincial Nominee program that is viewed as a model across Canada, the number of

newcomers who settle in Manitoba has grown from 3,700 in 1999 to over 13,500 this year. In total, over 85,000 international immigrants have made Manitoba their home during the past ten years. Within three months of arriving, 85 percent of these newcomers have found work; and within five years, three quarters have become homeowners.

The decision of the federal government to cap total immigration to Canada could have long-term implications for economic growth in Manitoba. With the support of business and community leaders, our government will press Ottawa to recognize the success we have achieved with our provincial program – and to support continued progress towards our goal of settling 20,000 immigrants annually.

The dramatic expansion in skills training and post-secondary education over the past decade is the single most important factor in our economic growth strategy. Enrolment in Manitoba colleges and universities has grown by one-third since 1999. Active apprentices have more than doubled – from 3,555 to 8,005. And the percentage of students earning a high school diploma has risen from 72 to 81 percent.

Modernizing education is an ongoing task. A key recommendation of the 2010 Economic Summit held this past April was that we continue our efforts to ensure Manitoba employers have a skilled workforce to draw from and that young Manitobans have the educational opportunities they need to compete for the jobs of the future.

The Premier's Economic Advisory Council subsequently recommended the creation of a *Manitoba Youth Corps*, to provide mentoring opportunities and job experience to young people – starting in their high school years. To complement this initiative, our government will build on the success of the provincial Green Team and provide job opportunities for a diverse population of young people.

The availability of clean, renewable energy will be a competitive advantage for Manitoba far into the future. Our government supports the development of a Canadian clean energy strategy – as called for in the "Winnipeg Consensus" document produced by a coalition of national think tanks and business leaders. We are working with Saskatchewan to advance the development of an inter-provincial transmission grid, which will pave the way for energy exports to the West. And we are developing new hydro-electric capacity in the North, with ongoing construction at Wuskwatim this year and preparatory work underway for future dams.

Any future vision for hydro requires a significant investment to carry power from the dams in the north to markets in the south, west and east. The need for added transmission and converter capacity was identified by Manitoba Hydro in the early 1990s, but it was left to our government to provide the necessary leadership. Work will continue this year to establish a new line down the west side of the lakes–ensuring that the pristine intact boreal forest on the east side is preserved and becomes a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This important project must be completed and not tied up in litigation or red tape for years to come. Manitobans expect responsible leadership on this issue; we will not be reckless with the future of Hydro.

Despite our hydro energy advantage, Manitoba's economy is dependent on importing fossil fuels to heat our homes and fuel our cars, trucks and buses. In addition to contributing to Manitoba's greenhouse gas emissions, the purchase of fuels imported from elsewhere results in $3 billion in lost economic opportunity. This figure exceeds all of the income tax paid by Manitobans each year.

Building on initiatives in ethanol and biodiesel, we are implementing a forward-looking strategy to reduce the use of fossil fuels in Manitoba, and ensure that a larger share of the money spent on energy is retained here in Manitoba. This plan will see the further development of hydro, wind and geothermal power, in addition to expanded use of plug-in and electric vehicles. Improvements will also be made to apprenticeship programs, recognizing the growing importance of green jobs to our economy.

All of these initiatives will help reduce greenhouse gases and protect our natural environment while at the same time grow our economy. Manitoba's spectacular wilderness areas are a major attraction for visitors, and a centerpiece for our $1.2 billion tourism industry. World-wide, eco-tourism is growing at a rate of 20 percent annually, compared with seven percent for traditional tourism. As competition increases for travel dollars, there is an opportunity for Manitoba to protect and promote our natural assets so that they contribute to the prosperity of our province. Northern Manitoba, and the future East Side UNESCO site, will be major beneficiaries of this shift in the tourism market.

Affordability for business and consumers remains another key element of our Manitoba advantage. The costs of starting and operating a business in Manitoba are among the lowest in North America. This year, after a decade of continuous reductions, our small business tax will be eliminated entirely. We are the first province in Canada to achieve this tax-free zone for small businesses.

This year we will introduce new incentives to assist women and young people with business start-ups. We will continue our popular initiative to reduce Red Tape for small and larger businesses, and will begin applying the same principles to the non-profit sector. Recognizing the important role of community and service organizations, our government will seek ways to reduce paperwork and – where possible – move to multi-year funding arrangements. This new approach will be developed in partnership with the Manitoba Federation of Non-Profit Organizations.

**Training for the jobs of tomorrow, today**

Strong schools and training institutions are the key to building a better future for families and for our economy.

That's why our government has increased provincial funding for our schools each and every year since 1999, at a rate that exceeds economic growth. We have addressed the chronic underfunding of the nineties and tamed the skyrocketing school taxes that we saw during that period. Residential property taxes have, on average, stayed flat in Manitoba since 2000 – the only province to achieve this distinction.

One education tax on residential property has been eliminated, saving Manitoba taxpayers $145 million dollars a year, while the other has been moderated and for many families lowered. In the coming months our government will continue efforts to reduce the financial burden on property owners in a way that allows our schools to grow and develop.

Our government has worked hard with parents, teachers and school divisions to strengthen the foundations of our education system. Today we are taking steps to ensure that the education our children receive ranks among the very best in Canada.

Our education system must allow our children the best chance to succeed in the future. The days in which a high school diploma was the primary focus are gone, replaced by a new focus on "K to 12" and beyond. Success for young people today requires that they have the opportunity – and the choice – to pursue trades training, apprenticeships, or college and university qualifications. Our government will work with the high schools, colleges and universities of Manitoba to make this vision a reality.

Our government will work with teachers and parents to ensure that our education system is more parent friendly, and that parents have the tools they need to help their kids succeed. This process is underway. Changes announced this fall, including a common plain language report card and co-ordinated in-service days, will give parents the tools they need to help their children succeed. They will also make students more accountable, ensuring that along with rewards for hard work there are also consequences for late assignments, and that underperformance can result in a failing grade.

Early learning is critical to a child's success in school and later in life. Supplementing the early learning kits available to all parents, a new play-based core curriculum called "Early Returns" will be phased in for licensed child care centres and nursery schools. Additionally, our government will work with schools to address the challenges faced by parents of special needs children, particularly when their kids first enter the school system.

Expanded child care options remain a priority. Manitoba's Family Choices plan committed to fund 6,500 more licensed spaces and 35 new child care centre sites over five years. At only the half-way mark, funding has already been committed for 3,500 more spaces and 29 new centres. Beginning this year, day cares will be established in all new schools and in schools that have major renovations. Next steps will include more funded infant care spaces, to help new parents coming off maternity leave.

To support this expansion, Canada's first Child Care Safety Charter is now in force and the first regional online child care registry for parents in Canada – introduced in Brandon this year – will go province–wide next year.

Since 1999 wages have risen 49 percent and over 2,000 workers have been added in the last five years alone. On December 1st of this year the first child care worker pension outside Quebec will be launched.

Recognizing that schools can serve no positive role unless children are in class and feel safe and supported, our government will work with school divisions to increase attendance, reduce bullying and help students find the programming that best suits their needs and interests.

With overall graduation rates on the rise, we need to ensure that aboriginal students share equally in that success. Our government is working with Manitoba First Nations to develop the same supports for teacher development, curriculum and programming that are available in provincial school divisions. We are working with the Manitoba Métis Federation to support summer learning programs and the placement of elders in schools. Led by the Premier's Education, Poverty and Citizenship Advisory Council, initiatives to increase graduation rates in the provincial system will be examined and enhanced. A framework for our community schools will be entrenched in legislation.

Improvements to our schools depend on the hard work and dedication of our teachers. We will continue to work with teachers to ensure they are able to spend more time teaching and less time on administration.

For Manitoba students to learn and thrive in the modern economy, our schools must provide the very best start possible.

Reliable funding has undone the damage done during the 90s and today we commit our government to building on the successes of our schools, colleges and universities.

**Advancing health care, giving families faster and better care**

Regardless of which part of the province they live in, the thing that matters most to Manitobans is their family's health. Our government understands that.

That's why we have worked to repair the damage done to our health care system during the 1990s. Instead of firing nurses, we have hired 2,500 nurses and over 400 doctors to get more families the care they need. We have also added new technologists, pharmacists, health care aides, nurse practitioners and physician assistants to ensure patients are diagnosed and treated faster.

Today, we are moving our system forward with a plan to further invest in health care facilities and technologies to ensure health care professionals have the tools they need.

The list of improvements in the last year alone is notable. Among them are: Winnipeg's ACCESS Downtown; new ambulance facilities in Altona, Neepawa, and West St. Paul; the Eriksdale community cancer program and wellness centre; the first phase of the Victoria Hospital ER expansion; the Ste. Rose hospital expansion; and the Westman Lab expansion.

Many new facilities are under construction, including the Westman CancerCare Centre, the Flin Flon Clinic, the new Cardiac Centre and Maternity Ward expansion at St. Boniface; dialysis units in Winnipeg, Gimli,

Russell, Peguis and Berens River; and ambulance facilities in Ste. Rose and Arborg.

The coming year will see construction start on other projects, including ACCESS St. James, the new Women's Hospital, the Ste. Anne Hospital expansion, and the Mental Health Crisis Response Centre at the HSC.

Earlier this year, CancerCare Manitoba released its cancer health assessment which projects that Manitoba, consistent with other jurisdictions, could see a 50 percent increase in cancer cases over the next 20 years. Three years into the province's 5-year Cancer Action Plan, there has already been aggressive action on 34 of the 38 commitments in the plan. Our government will work with CancerCare Manitoba, the Canadian Cancer Society and other partners to revise the provincial Cancer Action Plan over the coming year to address prevention, screening and treatment, a full year ahead of schedule. We will also take further actions to reduce wait times for cancer treatments.

Our government will introduce a new ambulance helicopter program, which will save an estimated 35 to 50 lives a year by getting patients into emergency care more quickly.

The vast majority of Manitobans have a family physician, but we can do better. A major new goal is to ensure that by 2015 all Manitobans will be able to access a personal family physician at a time and place convenient to them. To achieve this, province-wide networks of care providers will be established, utilizing existing health care facilities and linking the services of doctors, nurses, and other health providers. We will also introduce new Quick Care clinics, staffed by nurse practitioners.

For remote communities a new Primary Care Health Bus will be introduced to provide check-ups, blood pressure and blood sugar tests, basic health education and chronic disease management. Mobile facilities will also be outfitted to provide cataract and ophthalmology services and minimally invasive surgeries to rural and remote communities, saving travel time and disruption for patients.

While improving services to citizens, our government will also take steps to ensure that our public health system is financially sustainable. We will focus on eliminating waste and inefficiencies in the system and ensuring that funding is directed to front line care. In 1996 a decision was made to create 13 regional health authorities, including two RHAs in Winnipeg. Since 1999, we have cut the number of RHAs from 13 to 11, streamlined the system with bulk purchasing, and reinvested these savings to help us add over 2,500 nurses.

Today, these efforts and an increased focus on efficiency among RHAs means Manitoba has some of the most cost-efficient hospital care in the country and among the lowest administrative costs, according to the Canadian Institute for Health Information. In the Winnipeg RHA corporate administrative spending is now below 3 percent. In the coming year our government will take steps to cap and further reduce corporate administration spending across the health system through legislation.

We will continue to restructure the governance of diagnostic services across Manitoba, and work with Regional Health Authorities to improve administrative capacity and accountability.

**Fighting Crime, protecting our neighbourhoods**

Crime is one of the toughest issues facing communities across Canada. Manitobans expect their justice system to give people the opportunity to avoid a life of crime and hold accountable those that choose to break the law.

With tough consequences, more police and effective prevention, our government is fighting crime and working to protect our neighbourhoods.

Since 1999 funding has been added for 219 new police officers. And 48 new prosecutors have been hired and a commitment has been made to hire more over the next five years. Our government will work with the City of Winnipeg and the Chief of Police to add officers and increase community based policing in Winnipeg. Police resources will be added to other areas of the province as well.

Building on the success of our strategy to cut auto theft, a *Gang Response and Suppression Program* will be expanded to intensively track and monitor offenders. GRASP focuses resources on high-risk offenders, including those gang members most likely to endanger the community. As an integral part of the program, more probation officers will be hired.

Our government will work with all partners in the justice system to make it more accessible outside of traditional business hours. A mental health court will be introduced to ensure that people with mental health issues receive appropriate support and supervision, and that police and court resources are better targeted at gangs and violent criminals.

Our government has been a leader in developing innovative laws to fight crime. More will be done. In the coming months a new law will be introduced to ensure criminals do not benefit from the supports offered to law-abiding Manitobans. We will continue our work with the federal government to strengthen the criminal code – seeking tougher consequences for home invasions, carjacking and knife crimes. We will also work with the medical community to ensure better tracking of prescription drugs that get misused as street drugs. And we will enhance our successful *Safer Communities and Neighborhoods Act*, giving communities and Public Safety Investigators additional ways to shut down houses used for organized crime purposes.

*Tracia's Trust*, Manitoba's strategy to counter sexual exploitation, has been applauded for mandating the reporting of child pornography and introducing a coordinated agency and police initiative to help get trafficked youth off the streets. Efforts will be strengthened this year with more transition beds and supports for vulnerable and exploited youth. A comprehensive provincial strategy on human trafficking will be incorporated into *Tracia's Trust* to complement federal laws.

Groundbreaking legislation will also be introduced giving victims of sex trafficking and sexual exploitation the ability to seek remedies from those who have recruited, harmed and profited from them.

In recent years our provincial jail system has been significantly expanded – adding the equivalent of another Headingley – to address an overcrowding of facilities that is dangerous for guards and an obstacle to the rehabilitation of inmates. This year another significant expansion of our existing jails is planned with another 300 units being added. Additionally, our government will begin the process of designing and building new prison facilities.

Successful and innovative programs that work with families to steer young people toward education, not crime, will be expanded.

Targeted programs will help kids stay in school and out of gangs and a portion of the new youth corps resources will help at-risk youth find employment as an alternative to gang life.

Addressing crime requires a thoughtful, multi pronged approach.

Our plan will ensure that our courts and police have the tools that they need to keep criminals off our streets and invest in proven prevention programs that address the root causes of crime.

**Investing in the priorities of Manitoba families**

With each day, more and more people are choosing to call Manitoba their home because our quality of life is high and our cost of living is low.

Manitoba drivers are commuting with some of the lowest automobile insurance rates anywhere in Canada. Families are powering their homes with the lowest electricity rates in North America. And, more families are accessing the second most affordable child care rates in the country.

Our consumer protection strategy helps families by cracking down on unfair payday loans and negative option billing, and creating a code of ethics to protect grieving families when they must purchase funeral services and products.

Our plan will expand to include new protections for families when buying cell phones, condominium units, and insurance. New measures will ensure that Manitobans are equipped with important information when buying or leasing vehicles. And steps will be taken to better protect Manitobans buying travel packages and having their vehicles repaired.

Manitoba is among the most affordable provinces in which to own a home, rent an apartment or buy a condominium. But some people who are in need of affordable apartments have been challenged by low vacancy rates and steep or unanticipated rent increases. Beginning this year, renters and small landlords will have the assistance of an independent Tenant Advisor Office. New measures will be developed to better protect renters when apartments are converted to condominiums and to reduce the impact of

rent increases while balancing the need for landlords to upgrade units and improve our housing stock.

Our government will also act to ensure that Manitoba retains its national advantage in low costs for buying a home. Additional lands in Winnipeg will be made available for development. Fort Whyte Alive will be assisted with planning for an innovative new housing development based on green housing principles. Measures to protect against real estate fraud will be introduced. And to improve our existing communities, *Neighborhood's Alive* will be expanded.

Our newly launched *Downtown Residential Development Grant Program*, in partnership with the City of Winnipeg, will support more people living downtown to continue the revitalization momentum that has been achieved over the last decade. This program, along with developments such as the Museum for Human Rights and Manitoba Hydro Headquarters, is realizing the vision of more people living, working and visiting in downtown Winnipeg. Over the past decade, funding to the City of Winnipeg has increased by 70 percent – helping the city improve infrastructure, enhance facilities, and hold the line on taxes.

To ensure that the short sighted mistakes of the 1990s cannot be repeated, current government policies on development will be put into legislation. Never again will developments outside of Winnipeg be allowed to spring up without guarantees that the water and sewage needs of those homes will be properly addressed. Inspections aimed at identifying leaky septic systems polluting our water will be increased.

In 2003 our government announced an interim target on nutrient reduction to help address the algae damaging Lake Winnipeg and other lakes and waterways. A balanced approach was taken to ensure that all aspects of Manitoba society did their part to start reducing the damage they were causing. Many steps have been taken to address the problems. In the coming months a new target will be set, and our government will work with all sectors of Manitoba and the provinces and states that share our watershed to develop ways to save our lakes.

Our government remains committed to restoring Manitoba's major marshes, including working with the International Institute for Sustainable Development on a biomass project at Netley-Libau marsh that will reduce the amount of phosphorus and nitrogen entering Lake Winnipeg as well as offset carbon emissions.

New protected areas will be added in the coming days. In the last twelve months alone our government has permanently protected one million hectares of Manitoba. Neultin Lake and Colvin Lake are large wilderness parks that provide important habitat to species of concern such as the barren-ground caribou and wolverines. These parks total 610,000 hectares, an area larger than the province of PEI. The carbon sequestration value of these areas alone is estimated to be 126 million tonnes of CO2 – the equivalent of taking a million and a half cars off the road. In Lake Winnipegosis a cluster of islands twice the size of Winnipeg will become Manitoba's 84th provincial park. Apart from preserving our

natural lands, our parks and wilderness areas are also an important form of recreation and an international tourism draw. Our government will continue to improve the quality of our parks for Manitoba families

Manitoba, which produces just three percent of the nation's green house gases, has one of the most ambitious GHG reduction targets in legislation. Our government will redouble its efforts towards further reductions. The importance of climate change is seen in the stress on our environment, especially on our arctic animals such as the polar bear. The new International Polar Bear Conservation Centre at the Assiniboine Park Zoo will help protect polar bears while educating Manitobans and the world about the impact of climate change. *The Polar Bear Protection Act* will be strengthened. Efforts will be taken to increase awareness of our beluga population and determine if it too is under increasing stress.

It is unacceptable that there are more First Nation homes without running water in Manitoba than in any other province or territory. Our government will work with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, First Nation leadership and the federal government to have the current water infrastructure schedule greatly accelerated.

Our government will work with families to provide healthy recreational opportunities. Manitoba's community clubs are central to promoting healthy living and a sense of community. Activities in a community club can help divert young people away from other activities that may lead them into trouble with the law. Our government will work with community clubs and municipalities to strengthen the infrastructure and programming of our community centers around the province. A program will also be launched in the coming year to help revitalize the recreation infrastructure of rural Manitoba.

Our government must ensure that its priorities reflect the needs of our seniors. The improvements made to our health care system over the last decade, and planned for the coming years, will be pivotal to making Manitoba Age-Friendly. The next biggest challenge our population will face as it ages is access to appropriate housing. Several years ago, this government launched a long-term care plan that has seen thousands of spaces added across home care, supportive housing, personal care homes and supports in seniors housing. As demographics change and Manitobans live longer, a major revision to Manitoba's long-term care plan will soon be launched. The first goal is supporting seniors to live in their own homes safely with home care and other supports. However, some seniors ultimately require other living options including personal care homes, and this need is expected to increase in the years ahead. The new long-term plan will include a personal care home construction program to help meet this need, as well as other options for families such as enhanced supportive housing and innovative initiatives to help seniors live at home as independently as possible.

The Safety Aid program that helps improve home security for seniors will be expanded to additional communities, and then expanded further still to help Manitobans of all ages.

Pension plans are an important retirement tool, and our government will continue its work to support and improve them. Currently 47 percent of Manitoba's workforce is covered by pension plans, compared to 38 percent nationally. A public education campaign will be launched to encourage pension plan members to take full advantage of their pension options. Pension benefits rules will be improved to better reflect the changing needs of families. Manitoba will work with the federal and other provincial governments on ways to enhance the Canada Pension Plan.

Our government remains dedicated to working with families in need to help them climb over the welfare wall, find paying jobs, and break the intergenerational cycle of dependency. According to Statistics Canada, since 1999 the poverty rates for children and single parent families living in Manitoba have decreased more than in any other province. Our overall poverty rate is now the second lowest in Canada. However, the same statistics tell us that there is more work to do. Under the Rewarding Work strategy, initiatives will be further strengthened to get Manitobans off welfare and into work.

The provincial minimum wage will be increased, to ensure that the efforts of young people and low-income workers are properly rewarded.

Additionally we will work with high schools to provide more information on workplace health and safety for young workers.

With the added help of historic new federal and provincial investments, we will work with families at risk to help them fix parenting problems before they deteriorate to the point that children have to be taken into care. A new leading edge support program will help eighteen year olds move from foster care to independence. Our Suicide and FASD strategies will be strengthened further. A review of the child protection authorities governance will be undertaken to ensure that we continue to move in the right direction to deliver on our Changes for Children agenda. The review will be in keeping with the long-term goals of the Aboriginal Justice inquiry – Child Welfare Initiative, including the need to continually improve accountability and services for children and families.

*The Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Act* will be amended to better protect vulnerable Manitobans from abuse at the hands of caregivers.

**Developing our rural and northern communities**

Rural and northern Manitobans now have more access to the services they rely on, closer to home – for everything from health care to education to job opportunities. And we have seen housing starts, building permits, and the numbers of businesses increase significantly over the last ten years. In the North, mining, roads, and dam construction are providing job opportunities, and there has been a 27 percent increase in enrolment at the University College of the North.

Our value-added processing has increased by 52 percent and our crop production has become the most diverse and adaptable on the Canadian prairies. And mining production is expanding in Manitoba with advancements at Wabowden, Bissett, and Snow Lake, which will produce more than 500 jobs in northern Manitoba and more that $500 million in private investment.

The last decade has also seen tremendous growth in our rural population with international immigration to rural Manitoba increasing 261 percent, one of the highest regional immigration rates in Canada. Many rural communities have benefitted from this growth in immigration.

In the coming year our government will work with rural communities to increase measures to further encourage immigration to rural Manitoba, for the benefit of the whole province.

Since 1999, rural and northern students have more options to obtain an education close to home, more supports if they choose to pursue their education away from home, and more opportunities to build their careers in their home communities. Programs such as the rural/northern bursary have helped level the playing field for education costs. New regional UCN centres are a major component of our Northern Development Strategy.

Despite these improvements, Manitobans who live in rural and remote communities often find it difficult to achieve their "red seal" level of apprenticeships. This is due to a variety of factors, including remoteness, and lack of access to the necessary training through employment. Our government will develop innovative ways of addressing these challenges to ensure rural and northern Manitobans have access to skills training and access to skilled workers.

As part of this transformation Manitoba and the federal government are investing over $3.5 million towards the construction of the Northern Manitoba Mining Academy in Flin Flon and the purchase of two state-of-the-art training simulators. These investments will provide northern residents, including youth and Aboriginal people, with local access to training for high-paying, high-skilled, sustainable jobs close to their homes. Current workers will have access to training to upgrade their skills and adapt to new technologies.

The Community Economic Development Fund will be redeveloped to offer single-window one-stop shop services to Northern Manitobans. The CEDF will be diversifying its loan products to better meet the changing needs of northern businesses.

Healthcare for rural and northern Manitoba families has been improved over the past decade with the addition of new dialysis units, ambulance services, diagnostic equipment, and cancer treatments closer to home. Today there are 111 more doctors practicing in rural Manitoba than in 1999, and more than 1,000 nurse vacancies have been filled. New or renovated hospitals have been opened in Brandon, Swan River, Pinawa, Gimli, Morden/Winkler, Ste. Anne, and Shoal Lake – and a new hospital is

underway for Selkirk. New commitments will also be made, including the Dauphin ER expansion and redevelopment.

Our government has helped attract more doctors and nurses to the North by expanding training and recruitment initiatives. Our new northern and remote family medicine residency program is fully subscribed with 25 medical residents who have committed to return at least two years of service in northern or remote locations. Doctors in northern Manitoba now receive a 25 percent differential in pay to help with recruitment and retention. These efforts are paying off, with the Burntwood Community Health Clinic in Thompson now fully staffed with family doctors. A new acquired brain injury unit and new addictions facility opened recently in Thompson, and in Flin Flon construction has started on a new medical clinic and planning is underway for a new ambulance station.

Our government will work with rural and other Manitobans, including Brandon University and the UCN, to develop a renewed recruitment and retention strategy for medical professionals.

Rural and Northern Manitoba in particular have benefitted significantly from the massive redevelopment of our highways infrastructure. In 2007 our government committed to a ten-year plan to renew our infrastructure in all areas of the province. Over the first four years of the plan we have built or overhauled over 5,000 kilometres of roadway and over 65 bridges. In the coming months a plan will be unveiled for the next five years of construction.

The investments in highway and bridge renewal are paying dividends. Just this year, two major highways – Hwy 68 through the Interlake and Hwy 83 between Swan River and Roblin – were both designated RTAC highways. Since 2007, over 340 kilometres of highway have been newly designated as RTAC roads, increasing the capacity to haul goods and providing economic benefits to the communities that they serve. While the term "RTAC" means little to urban Manitobans, rural Manitobans know it is the type of highway that helps connect them to the world economy, and brings with it the potential of greater economic growth.

Some municipalities struggle with maintaining their bridges. Our government will work with municipalities to help ensure this part of our infrastructure link is maintained as well.

We continue to make significant investments in single access roads and are improving routes to a number of northern and First Nations communities including Norway House and Cross Lake. Our government is doing more than ever before to ensure all Manitoban's have the economic and social opportunities that a transportation link brings.

Drainage throughout rural Manitoba has been improved over the last decade, but the rains of the past several years have shown us that even more needs to be done, especially in the Interlake region of the Province. Our government will work with the federal and municipal levels of government to improve co-operation in identifying and addressing problem areas. More resources will be added to help address these problems.

Agriculture continues to play an important role in Manitoba's economy with one job in 11 involved in agricultural production or food manufacturing. Since 2008, $889 million in cost-shared support has gone to Manitoba producers in insurance premiums, disaster assistance and income stabilization. And another $180 million has gone into farmers' pockets from the Farmland School tax rebate since 2004.

Manitoba producers have told us that they want predictable, common sense programs to help manage risk in their farm businesses. Over the last 10 years we have enhanced the insurance program, including introducing excess moisture insurance as a permanent feature. Manitoba has the highest participation rate in crop insurance of any province in Canada.

Our government will introduce further improvements to this system, including introducing new insurance products to assist sectors of the industry who have not traditionally accessed these programs.

In recent years, our government has worked with community leaders in Brandon to bring exciting change to the community's downtown. Investments in Renaissance Brandon have already resulted in the development of the community's first-ever skateboard park and have helped complete the demolition work necessary to allow for the redevelopment and expansion of the city's YMCA. We have also worked with the community to invest in affordable housing including rehabilitating existing stock and building new units. In the year ahead, we will be working with Brandon leaders on a long-term vision for downtown renewal with a focus on economic development, physical renewal of existing buildings and ensuring the downtown meets the needs of its increasingly diverse community.

As all Manitobans are aware, this summer and fall were among the wettest months in recent history. Rainfall was 160 percent above normal. The chance of significant flooding this spring is therefore high. Manitoba's Emergency Measures Organization is already working with municipalities to move to an early state of preparedness.

In closing I want to recognize some special events that have taken place in the past year, honouring Manitoba's past and pointing to the open, inclusive society we have become.

Last spring, this Legislature gave unanimous consent to the *Aboriginal Languages Act*, which recognizes seven aboriginal languages of Manitoba and declares the importance of preserving our aboriginal culture into the future.

In August, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II visited Manitoba and unveiled a cornerstone for the new Canadian Museum of Human Rights. It incorporates a stone from the meadow where, in 1215, King John signed the *Magna Carta*.

Yesterday, to acknowledge the founding role of Louis Riel, the first legislative assembly of the province of Manitoba was recognized. As a

companion announcement, a new Métis Policy was adopted for Manitoba, to strengthen our partnerships with the Métis people, and promote the advancement of Métis culture, education and economic development.

Homecoming 2010 gave communities and families in Manitoba an opportunity to show off our province, its opportunities and its great future. Centrallia showed the future for small and medium businesses. And the Province's support will enable dozens of Manitoba artists to be showcased at the National Arts Centre's Prairie Scene in the spring of 2011.

On a final note, I am proud to announce that the Red River College's Downtown Campus will be named in honour of the late Duff Roblin, a leader who dedicated himself to building a modern education system for Manitoba.

As you proceed to carry out the responsibilities the people of Manitoba have entrusted to you, I trust that Divine Providence will guide your deliberations in the best interests of all our citizens.